

KEEPING OUR HEADS ABOVE WATER

NEWS FLASH!

The “Managing Stress Webinar” has been postponed to Saturday, February 10 from 11am – 12 noon Eastern Standard Time. This second gathering of Unaccompanied Tour (UT) families in the DC area will include a stress management workshop via a ‘live’ toll-free conference call and simultaneous webcast. The Family Liaison Office (FLO) is partnering with the Transition Center to present the workshop in their classrooms at the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, VA. Adults will start with an hour (10 – 11 am) of socializing and networking, followed by the stress management workshop. Children are welcome to attend and participate in separate supervised activities.

Managed Health Network’s professional trainer, Melinda Martin-Clark, will conduct the interactive “Managing Stress Seminar” from 11a.m. to noon, EST. A simultaneous conference call and webcast (aka “Webinar”) will allow participation by overseas employees on long-term TDY and PCS assignment to unaccompanied posts and their family members (Eligible Family Members and Members of Household). There is a Participant’s Handbook that will be used during the session – please request one in advance from FLO (see contact info below). To join the Webinar at 11 a.m.:

- Go to <http://www.raindance.com/>
- Click on “join conference”
- Scroll down to “Reservationless Conference Call”
- Enter your name, email address, and the Conference Code: 9690198.
- Dial 1.800.531.3250 and enter the same Conference Code when prompted. This is a toll-free number within the U.S. or over an overseas U.S.-based line or cell phone.

To attend in person, we **MUST** have your names in advance in order for you to be admitted by security – **EVEN IF** you hold a DoS badge. Please RSVP to Nan Leininger, Family Liaison Office, at 202.647.3179 no later than COB February 7. Please direct questions to LeiningerNW@state.gov or email FLOaskUT@state.gov.

Question of the month this time comes from an employee about to leave.

Q. How can I keep the bonds alive between me and my children while I’m on the other side of the world? Will our infant even know who I am? Will the teenager still talk to me?

A. Open and frequent communication is vital to maintaining strong bonds between you and your family members, both adult and child. There is a need to talk about how you will communicate – before the airline tickets are in hand. Talk about discipline and decision making regarding the children. (No “second-guessing” the person left in charge!) Hold a family meeting to discuss why it is important that the parent is going away and how the family will function during the

separation. Take time to acknowledge that the children are making a sacrifice, too, and listen to and address their concerns.

First order of business is to define clearly why you are going. Everyone has a slightly different matrix drawn from pragmatic/practical, patriotic, professional and personal reasons. It is essential that everyone involved understand the reasons and have a shared vision of why it is important to do this at this time. Discuss pros and cons and how to alleviate some of the negatives. When talking to children (actually, to adults, too) it is important to have them explain back what they have heard. A true story – one little boy was very upset that his father was being sent to “Bad Dad City.” Many other children and teens will decide they are at fault and you are leaving because they were “so bad.” Talk to them!

Secondly, agree on how often and how you will communicate. Don’t make promises you can’t keep – say you’ll try to communicate every day/every 48 hours/week, or whatever – but let them know there may be times when it just won’t be possible. Emails are fast, inexpensive, and easy. Purchase a webcam or other computer equipment needed to set up video calls, if these will be possible from the country of assignment. Practice using the new system before you go!

Phone calls are a big step up – people crave the sound of your beloved voice. Everyone at the DSAC Iraq briefings gets a new middle name: “ET” – guess why! An old fashioned hand-written letter is truly cherished. If your children are pre-literate, take colored pencils with you (crayons can melt) and draw pictures. You don’t have to be Rembrandt to thrill a child with a drawing of “This is where Mommy eats her corn flakes.” Before you go and throughout the tour, make tapes of yourself reading stories, singing songs, telling tales of your own childhood. Videos of a spirited family game of flag football or a day at the beach can be watched repeatedly to help keep your memory alive. If you have an infant, leave a gently worn T-shirt behind, dabbed with a tiny bit of aftershave, cologne, bath powder – whatever scents you normally wear.

Prepare “bonding” activities in advance:

- Record favorite bedtime stories for young children.
- For an older child, consider getting two copies of a book that is of interest but a bit challenging. After the two of you read each chapter, discuss it on the phone.
- Share “ownership” of a fantasy sports team, arrange to play long distance chess or arrange some other joint activity.
- Purchase gifts and cards to be left for special occasions. Consider setting up a “treasure hunt” (leaving small treats or notes hidden around the house, with clues to be provided over the weeks or months to come).
- Give family members journals or scrapbooks to record their daily lives so that you will be able to catch up when you return.
- Provide a special photo of yourself: it could be ironed onto a t-shirt or pillowcase, placed in a special frame, laminated for portability, or whatever will make you seem close by.